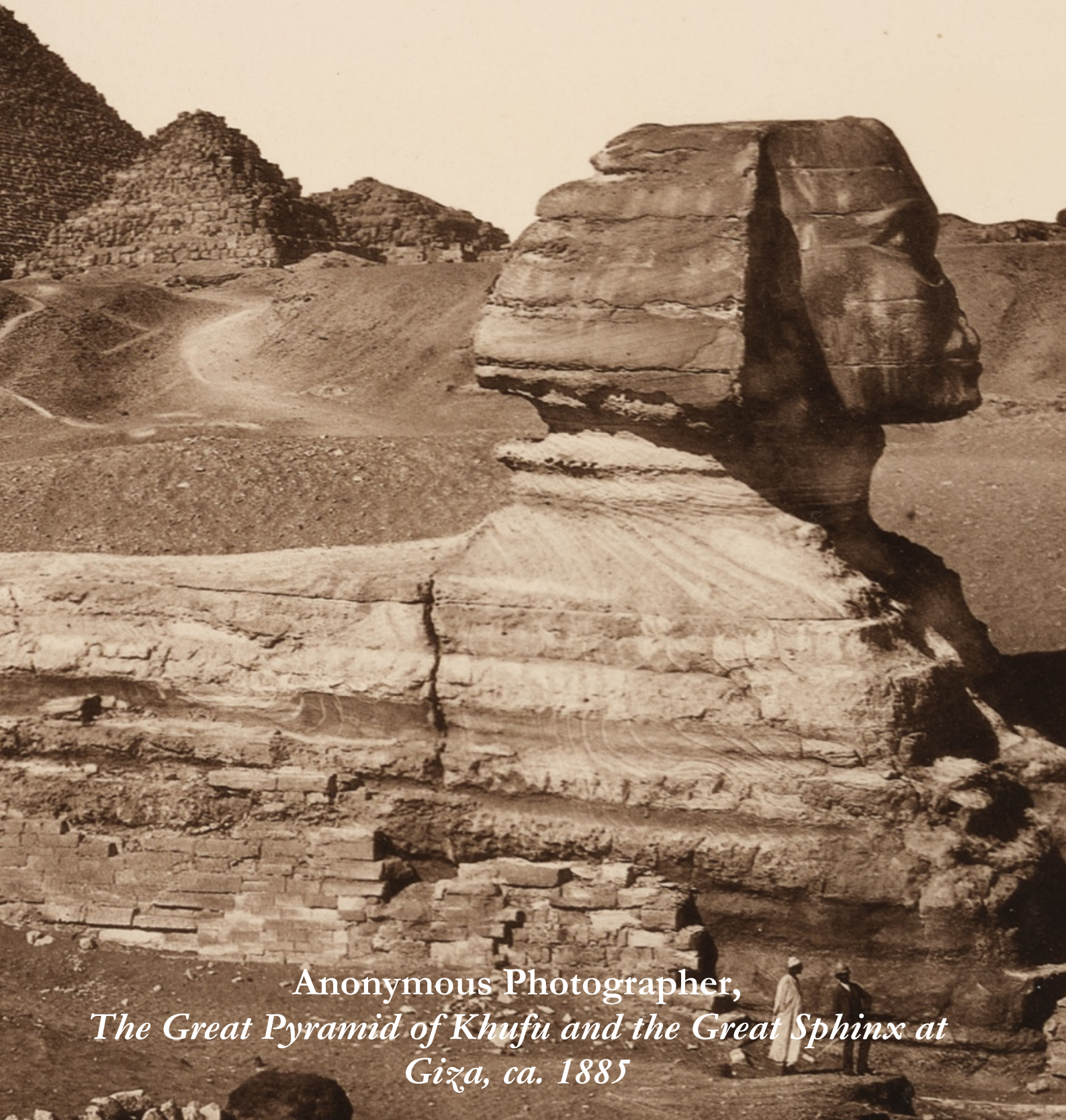


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Anonymous Photographer,
*The Great Pyramid of Khufu and the Great Sphinx at
Giza, ca. 1885*

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ANONYMOUS PHOTOGRAPHER

(ca. 1885)

THE GREAT PYRAMID OF KHUFU AND THE GREAT SPHINX AT GIZA, CA. 1885

Photographer's credit in negative

Albumen print

19.5 x 25.5 cm; (7 3/4 x 10 in.)

Provenance

Private Collection, England.

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The present photograph belongs to the extensive corpus of nineteenth-century views of the Giza plateau through which the monuments of ancient Egypt were increasingly documented, circulated and encountered by an international public. Dating to approximately 1885, it presents the Great Sphinx in the foreground with the Great Pyramid of Khufu rising behind it, establishing a powerful visual relationship between two of the most enduring monuments of the ancient world. The image is particularly valuable as a record of the archaeological appearance of Giza during the later nineteenth century, at a moment when the gradual removal of accumulated sand was beginning to reveal more fully the monumental character of the Sphinx.

Carved directly from the limestone bedrock of the Giza plateau, the Great Sphinx represents the earliest known monumental sculpture of its type in Egypt. The colossal figure combines the body of a recumbent lion with the head of a king, embodying the conjunction of physical power, royal authority and divine protection that characterises Egyptian monumental sculpture. Traditionally associated with the reign of Khafre, the Sphinx forms part of the Fourth Dynasty funerary landscape at Giza, although its precise chronology and relationship to the surrounding monuments have long been the subject of scholarly discussion. Its placement beside the causeway and temple complex of Khafre indicates that it was conceived as an integral component of a highly ordered sacred and funerary landscape rather than as an isolated sculpture.

Behind the Sphinx, the Great Pyramid of Khufu dominates the horizon. Constructed during the Fourth Dynasty, the pyramid was the principal monument of Khufu's funerary complex and remained the largest man-made structure in the world for millennia. Its presence in the photograph establishes a compelling dialogue between architectural and sculptural monumentality: the geometric mass of the pyramid contrasts with the anthropomorphic form of the Sphinx, while both are united by their common limestone material and their position upon the Giza plateau.

The composition is characteristic of nineteenth-century archaeological photography in its emphasis upon scale, spatial recession and direct observation. The Sphinx occupies the principal foreground position, allowing the viewer to appreciate the enormous dimensions of the sculpture while simultaneously recognising the pyramid beyond. The relationship between the two monuments creates an unusually concentrated image of Giza, compressing the essential elements of the plateau into a single frame. The surrounding sand and exposed masonry further emphasise the distinction between the ancient monument and the modern landscape through which it was being encountered.

Of particular historical importance is the visible condition of the Sphinx itself. By approximately 1885, substantial quantities of sand had been removed from around the monument, although the sculpture remained partially embedded within the accumulated deposits that had periodically obscured it throughout its history. Earlier excavations, most notably those undertaken under Auguste Mariette and later Gaston Maspero, had contributed to the gradual exposure of the monument. The photograph

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therefore records the Sphinx during an intermediate stage in the long process of excavation and conservation that would ultimately transform its appearance.

The use of the albumen process places the photograph within the dominant photographic technology of the period. The medium permitted the production of prints of considerable descriptive precision, capable of registering the weathered limestone, irregular surfaces and subtle tonal distinctions of the Giza landscape. The warm tonal character of the albumen print also lends the scene a restrained atmospheric quality, while retaining the archaeological specificity required of a documentary view.

The shaved photographer's credit in the negative is itself suggestive of the commercial history of nineteenth-century Egyptian photography. Such photographs circulated widely as individual prints and within albums, serving simultaneously as souvenirs, educational images and visual records for an audience unable to travel to Egypt. Although the identity of the photographer has not been preserved, the image belongs to the broader photographic tradition established by practitioners such as Francis Frith, Félix Bonfils and Antonio Beato, whose extensive Egyptian series helped establish a visual vocabulary for the ancient landscape.

Ultimately, *The Great Pyramid of Khufu and the Great Sphinx at Giza* is significant precisely because of its apparent simplicity. By bringing together the most recognisable sculptural and architectural monuments of ancient Egypt, the photograph encapsulates the enduring fascination of Giza while preserving a particular historical moment in the modern excavation of the Sphinx. It is both an image of antiquity and a document of its nineteenth-century rediscovery.

COLNAGHI

COLNAGHI *London*

26 BURY STREET, LONDON SW1Y 6AL
UNITED KINGDOM

MONDAY TO FRIDAY
10AM-6PM

+44 (0)20 7491 7408

contact@colnaghi.com

COLNAGHI *Madrid*

CALLE GENERAL CASTAÑOS 9
PLANTA BAJA, DCHA.
28004 MADRID

MONDAY TO FRIDAY
BY APPOINTMENT

spain@colnaghi.com

COLNAGHI *New York*

23 EAST 67TH STREET, FOURTH FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10065
USA

MONDAY TO FRIDAY
10AM-6PM

+1 (917) 388-3825

newyork@colnaghi.com

COLNAGHI *Brussels*

RUE JACQUES JORDAENS 30
1000 BRUXELLES
BELGIUM

BY APPOINTMENT ONLY

brussels@colnaghi.com